

2
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 ON PAGE 11

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NSC Officer Removed In Probe

Staff Aide Refused Polygraph Test Over Gadhafi Plan's Leak

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A veteran staff officer of the National Security Council has been transferred to the State Department after refusing to take a polygraph test or cooperate fully with an FBI investigation aimed at identifying the sources of an Oct. 2 report in The Washington Post about a secret deception plan aimed at Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, White House officials said yesterday.

A senior White House official said the staff officer, who formerly worked for the State Department, had offered to return there after refusing to take the polygraph examination. The official said the offer was accepted because NSC officials had "lost trust and confidence" in the staff officer.

Sources said that before this decision, the staff officer's house was searched by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation who arrived without a search warrant. The agents asked for and were given permission by the staff officer to search the house, the sources said.

The action was believed to be the first time during the Reagan administration that any member of the NSC staff was asked to leave because of an FBI investigation. A Defense Department official was fired after failing a polygraph test in an earlier disclosure case, and a State Department official resigned after admitting that he had leaked classified cables in another case.

Officials familiar with the current investigation said that several Cabinet-level officers involved in the Aug. 14 White House meeting that codified the deception plan had been interviewed by the FBI. They

said that 20 to 25 people had been interviewed and that polygraph tests had been administered to "seven or eight" NSC staff members.

The status of the investigation was described as "ongoing and at this point inconclusive" by the officials. The staff officer who returned to the State Department has not been charged with any wrongdoing, and officials who discussed the investigation yesterday were careful not to identify the person involved.

The officials said the FBI inquiry was targeted at the person or persons who provided Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward with a three-page memo sent by national security affairs adviser John M. Poindexter to President Reagan.

"One of the key elements" of the deception strategy, the memo said, "is that it combines real and illusory events—through a disinformation program—with the basic goal of making Gadhafi think [word underlined in original] that there is a high degree of internal opposition to him within Libya, that his key trusted aides are disloyal, that the U.S. is about to move against him militarily."

Much of the information generated by this plan was reported as fact by the American media, including The Washington Post, beginning with an Aug. 25 report in The Wall Street Journal.

After the memo's disclosure, Poindexter and other White House officials contended that the plan was designed to deceive Gadhafi, not the American news media. These officials said that it was possible that someone may have "freelanced" and presented the contents of the Poindexter memo as fact, but said that if they had done this they had operated without White House authorization.

However, officials who discussed the investigation yesterday said it had been limited to finding the sources of the Aug. 14 Poindexter memo and other memos referred to in The Post report on Oct. 2 and a subsequent report on Oct. 5. No investigation has been launched to determine if some official did "freelance" by feeding disinformation to The Wall Street Journal, the officials said yesterday, although senior

White House officials said in early October that such an inquiry already was under way.

"It wasn't the information in the [Post] story per se that mandated the leak investigation," said the senior White House official who discussed the inquiry. "It was the clear indication that a number of classified documents had been leaked. This is unauthorized disclosure. There's no investigation of the person to whom it was given; what is relevant is who leaked it. Any person who would do that shouldn't be in a position with access to confidential information. This could impact on national security."

The senior official said that anyone who had access to the Poindexter memo was interviewed by the FBI "without exception." However, it was learned from other sources that at least two of the nine Cabinet-level persons present at the meeting when the Poindexter memo was approved had not yet been interviewed.

The senior official said that the NSC's policy, communicated vocally by Poindexter and others to staff members, was that "everyone should cooperate fully" with the investigation. He said that techniques of the investigation and the question of who should be given polygraph tests were left to the FBI.

Poindexter and William J. Casey, director of central intelligence, volunteered to take polygraph tests, sources said. But they said that the FBI had not asked either of these officials or any others in the Cabinet-level group to submit to the polygraph, the so-called "lie detector."

Except for the staff officer who refused to take the polygraph test, "there has been a real willingness on everybody's part to cooperate," the senior official said.

Investigations for unauthorized disclosures have become a frequent feature of the Reagan administration, beginning with a 1983 probe into purported unauthorized disclosures about a change in the rules of U.S. military engagement in Lebanon. This development was reported by The Washington Post and NBC News.

This inquiry produced a bitter clash in the administration, with Casey and then-White House counsel Edwin Meese III advocating a presidential order for widespread polygraph use. Reagan eventually heeded the counsel of then-White House chief of staff James A. Baker III and Secretary of State George P. Shultz and declined to sign the order.

Shultz reportedly played a key role in Reagan's decision by refusing to take a polygraph test. Subsequently, he said he would resign before submitting to such an examination.